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PAGE-SETTING IN LATE OTTOMAN QUR'ĀNS. AN ASPECT OF STANDARDIZATION

The purpose of this paper is twofold. The primary aim is to account for the types of standardized page-setting that occur in Ottoman Qur'ān manuscripts of the 18th and 19th centuries. But this aspect of the later Ottoman Qur'ān has to be seen in the context of a wider process of standardization that affected all aspects of Qur'ān production after 1600, and which resulted in the production of copies that are immediately recognizable as Ottoman. The main evidence for the discussion comes from the very large number of Qur'ān manuscripts that survive from the last centuries of Ottoman history, since the literary and other sources available are limited.

In the 16th century there was considerable variety in Ottoman Qur'ān production, both in terms of styles of script, illumination and binding and in terms of the format of the manuscript, the page layout and the programme of decoration. This variety reflected the wide range of sources for Ottoman material culture in this period, and it was sustained by the great wealth accrued by the Ottoman elite as their empire expanded: as the century progressed, an increasing number of fine Qur'āns and other religious manuscripts were commissioned both for newly founded institutions and for personal use. By 1600, however, the pace of the empire's growth had slowed almost to a halt, and it became necessary to devote resources to the maintenance of what already existed rather than to the creation of new institutions. This change was accompanied by a series of political, social and economic crises, and it resulted in the initiative in Qur'ān production passing to a larger group of less wealthy patrons [1].

The events of the late 16th century and the early 17th are mirrored in a crisis in Qur'ān production, which may be detected, for example, in the disappearance from the capital of all but one school of calligraphy, that of Şeyh Hamdullah (d. *ca.* 1520). This development goes almost unremarked in Ottoman sources of the 18th and 19th centuries, who take the innate superiority of Hamdullah's style for granted. But it is striking that just one individual, Hasan Üsküdari (d. 1614 or 1615), was responsible for the transmission of this style to the scribes working in Istanbul in the 17th century. Even the school of Hamdullah, then, seems to have come close to extinction [2].

The same process of selection, by which all but one of a range of alternatives was eliminated, may be seen occurring in other aspects of Qur'ān production and associated arts in this period. Şeyh Hamdullah and the Ottoman calligraphers of the 16th century practised the six styles of calligraphy known as the Six Pens. In later centuries, though, this was the exception, so that the great 18th-century biographer of calligraphers, Müstakim-zade Süleyman Sa'deddin Efendi (d. 1788), consistently refers to later members of the school of Şeyh Hamdullah being trained in *hüsn-ü hatt-ı süls ü nesih* (*thulth* and *nasḫ* calligraphy). Thus the Six Pens had become two, one for large-format work and one for small. What is more, the main text of the standard later Ottoman Qur'ān was always written entirely in *nasḫ*, so that in this case the Six Pens were reduced to one [3].

The decoration and binding of Qur'ān manuscripts were subject to the same shrinking of the available options, which equated to standardization. Thus, the principal areas of illumination in most fine copies of the 17th century have gold and blue parti-coloured grounds, which are overlaid with scrolling tendrils set with diminutive floral motifs. These same copies are usually bound in morocco covers with recessed centre — and corner-pieces of a standard type, filled with pressure — moulded and gilded decoration. These were, of course, precisely the styles of illumination and binding found in copies of the Qur'ān written by Şeyh Hamdullah for Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481—1512) [4].

The way that the illumination was used to articulate the divisions of the text also became standardized. The double-page illuminations found in the best 16th-century examples were eliminated, and the beginning of the text was marked by a wide ornamental frame surrounding the first *sūra*, which was always confined to the right-hand page, and the beginning of the second *sūra*, which was always confined to the left-hand page. The composition of this frame also became very standardized. In the remainder of the manuscript, *sūra* headings were placed in a band the width of the text area, which is usually decorated, and gilt whorls or segmented discs set off with red and blue dots mark the conclusion of each verse [5].\

There was more variety in the occurrence and design of marginal devices. These could be used to mark the division of the text into as many as 120 equal sections (*juz'* and *ḥizb*), to signal the points in the text where the reader has to make a prostration (*sajdah*), and sometimes to divide *sūras* into groups of verses. The device usually includes a short inscription indicating what the device refers to (i. e. the word *juz'*, *ḥizb*, *sajdah*, etc.), but otherwise no formal distinction was made between devices serving different

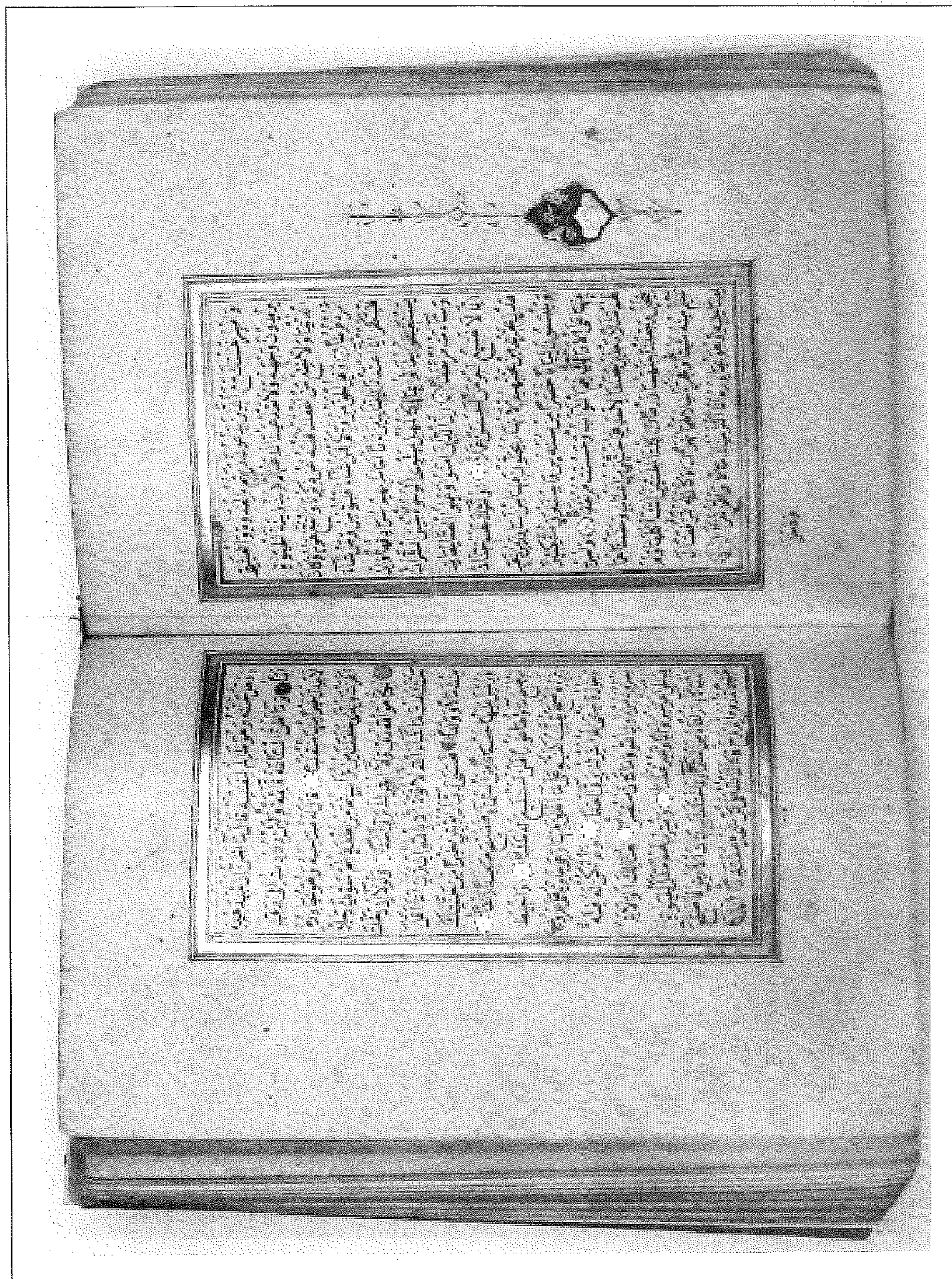


Fig. 1

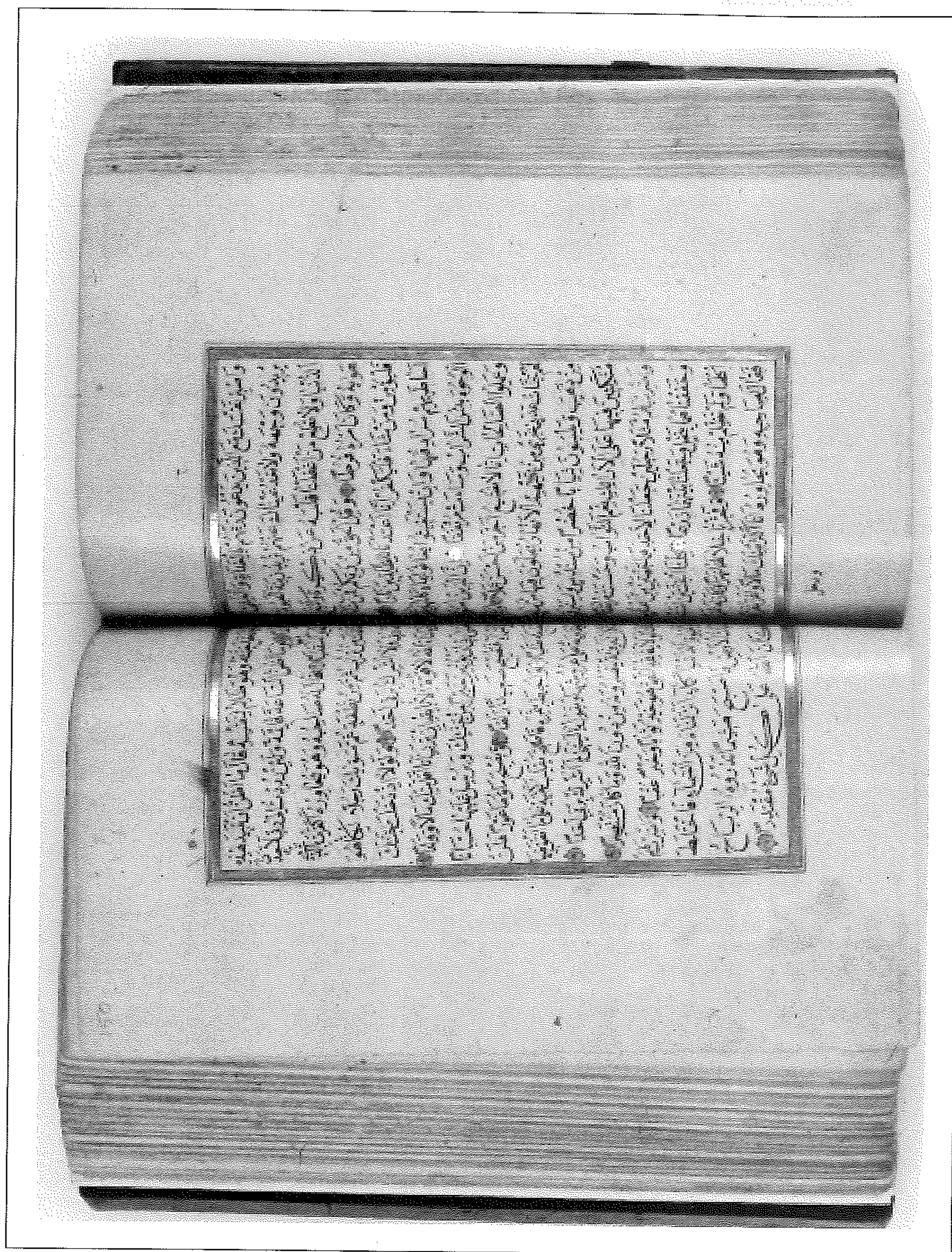


Fig. 2

purposes. Nevertheless, a range of designs, apparently selected at random, was used for the devices in any one manuscript.

The size of 17th-century Qur'āns was usually relatively modest, although there are exceptions. The character of one such exception is telling. The manuscript, which is dated 1694 and was copied in gold by an illuminator called Seyyid Abdullah, measures 43.6 by 28.5 cm closed, but the model chosen by the copyist-cum-illuminator was clearly a standard Qur'ān that was about a quarter this size. The result is that the illumination of the opening pages resembles a blown-up photograph of a copy of normal dimensions [6]. Given its large format, Seyyid Abdullah's Qur'ān manuscript must have been intended for a public institution, while the smaller copies of the period were probably made for use by individuals, although we cannot know this for certain as so few contain documentation relating to their owners.

The text in these smaller copies is always presented in the same manner. It fills a rectangular area that is off-centre with regard to the page as a whole and is surrounded on three sides by wide margins. The text area is always defined by a substantial frame composed of gold bands and coloured rules, and at first, it accommodated a varying number of lines of text. In the second half of the 18th century, however, this situation changed, and 15 lines of text to the page became the standard pattern. Qur'āns in this 15-line format, which remained standard in Ottoman Qur'ān manuscripts until the end of manuscript production on a mass scale in the late 19th century, may be divided into several groups.

In one, the scribe reproduced the text in the normal manner, taking care to fill each line so that the text was presented in as regular and well-balanced a manner as he (or she) could manage. The *basmalah* at the beginning of all but one *sūra* always fills a complete line, and the text in the last line of a *sūra* had to be modulated more carefully, as the heading that followed always filled a complete line. Otherwise, though, the text flows from line to line and from page to page in a relatively free manner.

In the second group, the setting of the text was pre-determined by another factor, which has been described most eloquently by François Déroche [7]. In Qur'āns of this type the physical structure of the manuscript was adapted to reflect the traditional division of the text into 30 equal sections known as *juz'*, creating a "perfect adequacy between text and quire structure". In other words, one gathering of ten folios was allocated to each *juz'*, with the result that manuscripts of this type are always composed of slightly more than 300 folios.

Once this degree of co-ordination had been achieved, it was possible to divide "the text of each *juz'* into twenty segments, so that each page should always bear the same part of the text. Theoretically, those page units are interchangeable between any Qur'ānic manuscripts produced under these conditions" [8]. The result of such a division of the text is that each page ends with a complete verse, and this is presumably why in Ottoman and post-Ottoman literature on calligraphy such systems are given the name *āyet ber kenār* (perhaps, "with freestanding verses") [9].

The term *āyet ber kenār* was employed by Müstakim-zade when referring to the Istanbul calligrapher called Baki-zade or Yağcı-zade Mustafa. Mustafa was a pupil of Müstakim-zade's own master, Eğrikapılı Mehmed Rasim (d. 1756), and "he possessed such a fine copying hand even before he received his licence that, while his master's son Mehmed Reşida was still an infant, he wrote a new copy of the Qur'ān and made [the child] a present of it when he gained his licence" from the child's father. Mustafa was a *mu'adhdhin* by profession, but after receiving his license he found time to make "many *āyet ber kenār* copies of the holy text" and to write myriad other works before his early death in 1170/1756—7 [10].

The meaning of the term *āyet ber kenār* was transmitted to the 20th century as part of calligraphic lore, and when, for example, Şevket Rado published a précis of Müstakim-zade's entry on Baki-zade (Yağcı-zade) Mustafa, he glossed the term as follows:

> *"Āyetlerin sahife sonunda bitirilmesi suretiyle yazılan Kur'an-ı Kerim'lere 'Āyetberkenar Kur'an' denir. Hafız olmak isteyenler ezberlerken bu türlü Kur'anları kullanırlar".*

> "Qur'āns that are written so that the verses end at the foot of the page are called '*āyet ber kenār* Qur'āns'. Those who wish to become a *ḥafīẓ* use this type of Qur'ān when they are learning [the text] by heart "[11].

The connection with *ḥuffāẓ* is supported by a rare ownership note in an unpublished *āyet ber kenār* Qur'ān in the Khalili Collection (ms. QUR 35). The manuscript was copied, perhaps for his own use, by an Istanbul schoolteacher called Hacı Abdullah and completed on 9 Jumādā I 1216 / 17 September 1801. Later the manuscript came into the possession of one Hafız Nazmeddin, who added an undated note in Ottoman Turkish on folio 1a, which reads

> *"Bu Kur'ān-ı azīmüşşānı hafız cem'iyeti olduğu gün pederim hediyeten bana vermiştir".*

> "My father gave me this Glorious Qur'ān as a gift on the day when the *ḥafīẓ* assembly took place".

The *ḥafīẓ* assembly was presumably the occasion when Nazmeddin was examined on his knowledge of the Qur'ānic text, and his status as a *ḥafīẓ* approved.

Déroche comments that the elaboration of the *āyet ber kenār* system "was certainly completed during the 18th century" [12], but the recent publication of fully formed examples from the same century shows that the system was already in existence by 1700. One of these examples, dated 1171/1757—8), is by a pupil of Mehmed Rasim called Yakacık Imamı Mustafa Efendi [13], but the earliest is a specimen in the Khalili Collection (ms. QUR 10), which was copied by Ahmad ibn Mahmud in 1124/1712—3 [14]. Ahmad ibn Mahmud was a pupil of Suyolcu-zade Mustafa Eyyubi (d. 1685 or 1686), according to Müstakim-zade, who had seen a Qur'ān written by him in 1099/1687—8, while Ševket Rado published the last page of a Qur'ān by him with a colophon dated 1115/1703—4 [14].

Ahmad ibn Mahmud's master, Suyolcu-zade, was a member of the inner circle of leading calligraphers who were responsible for the revival of *thulth* and *nasḥ* calligraphy in Istanbul in the second half of the 17th century. We may speculate, then, that the 15-line *āyet ber kenār* Qur'ān was cultivated in this milieu in the years following the crisis of the early 17th century. As already mentioned, this was a time when Qur'ān patronage had passed to a larger number of less wealthy clients. Indeed, the social level of

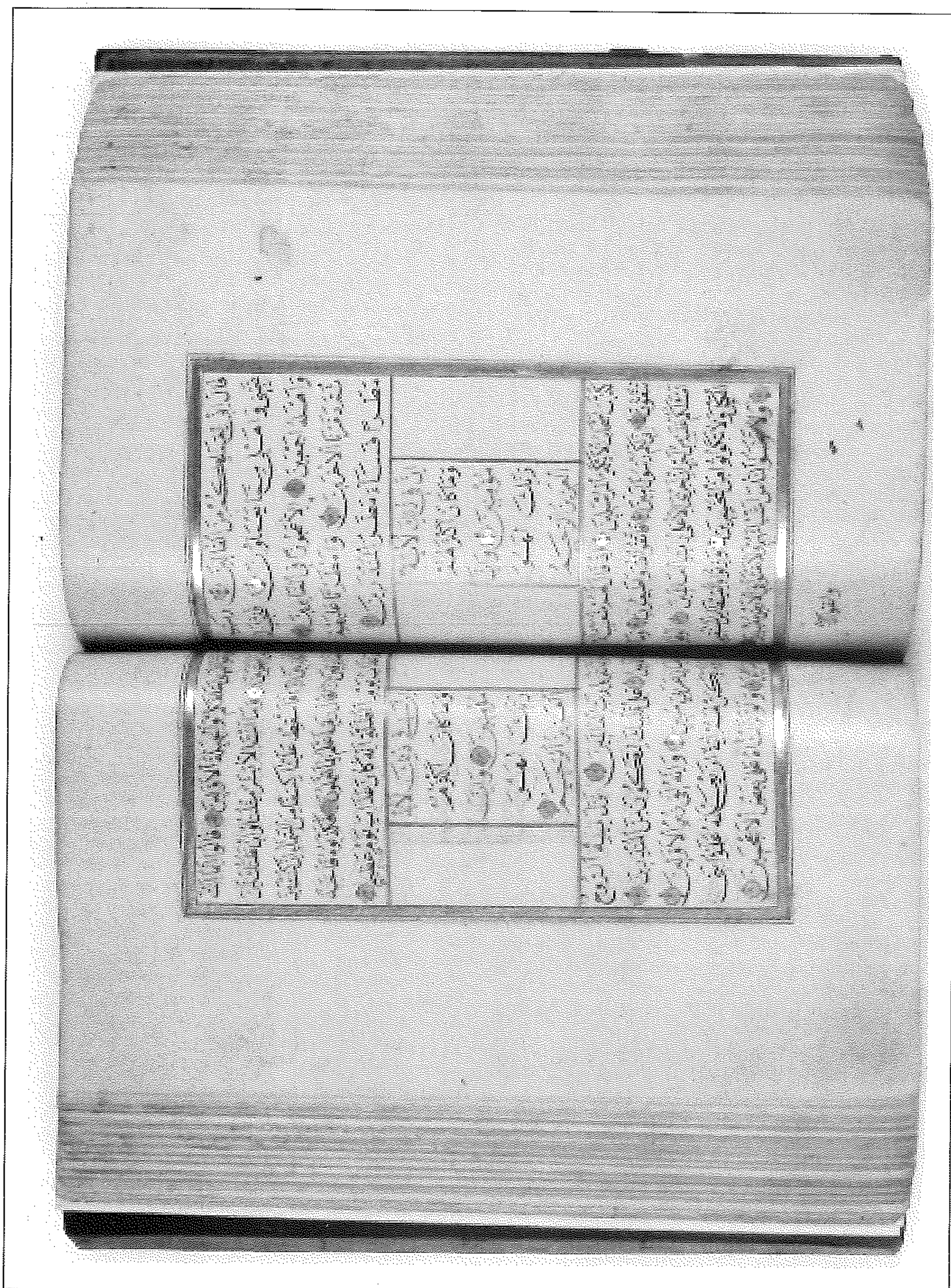


Fig. 3

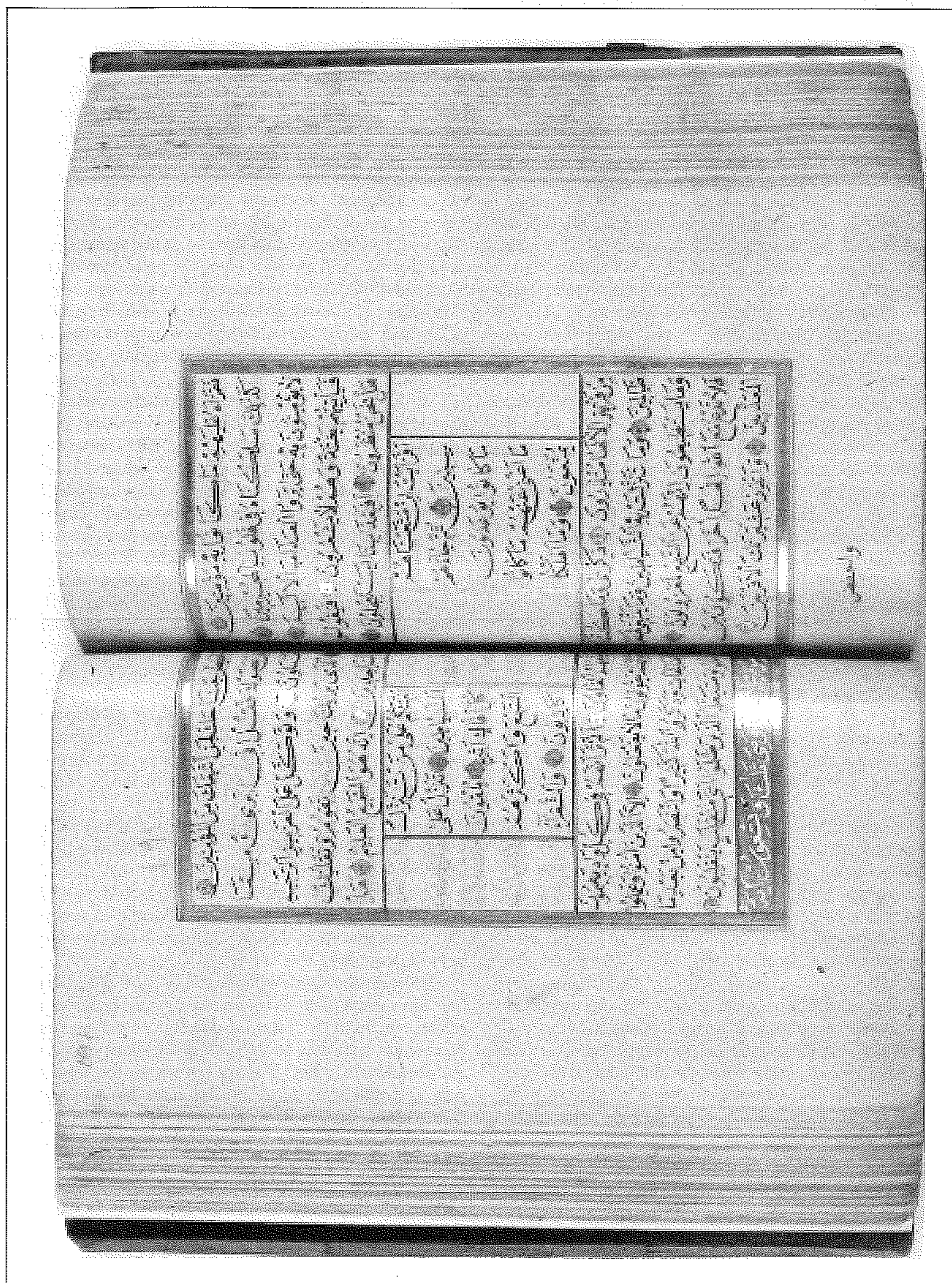


Fig. 4

the *ḥuffāẓ* who were the clientèle for such Qur'āns was not necessarily very high, and the Khalili manuscripts of 1712—3 and 1801, and five other examples in the Collection produced in the intervening years [16], are not of outstanding quality. They are "working manuscripts" used by religious men of modest means rather than great works of art.A further common feature of the seven Khalili *āyet ber kenār* Qur'āns from the period 1712—1801 is that the scribe followed more or less the same template in terms of which verses fell on which page. The result is that folios 149b—150a of Ahmad bin Mahmud's Qur'ān of 1712—3 (*fig. 1*) bear exactly the same text as folios 149b—150a of another Qur'ān in the Khalili Collection (ms. QUR 33), which was copied eight decades later, in 1204/1789—90 (*fig. 2*) [17]. In both cases, verses 28—34 of the *sūra al-Kahf* (XVIII) are written on the right-hand page, and verses 35—45 are written on the left-hand page.

Nevertheless, the functioning of an *āyet ber kenār* Qur'ān did not require that the scribe always follow the same template exactly, and it was possible for variants to creep in, and even for different *āyet ber kenār* templates to be devised. One variant of the original system is shown by the Khalili ms. QUR 8, which was written in 1201/1786—7 [18]. Folios 149b—150a of this manuscript, for example, contain verses 25—31 and 32—43 of *al-Kahf* rather than verses 28—34 and 35—45, which we find on these pages in the standard version. The variance is relatively minor, and it is clearly the result of the slippage of verses from one page to the next as the scribe progressed in copying a manuscript, since the variance increases gradually through the manuscript.

The *āyet ber kenār* system was invented because of the need for would-be *ḥuffāẓ* to learn the text of the Qur'ān by heart. Many aspired to the visual memorization of the holy text, and it seems that its presentation as a series of 600 or so discrete groups of verses was considered helpful in achieving this end. The link between this type of Qur'ān and visual memorization is illustrated in a very graphic manner by the development of an even more controlled version of the *āyet ber kenār* system, in which "rubrication of coincidence" occurs. In manuscripts that display this more developed system, which are called *tevāfuklu* (from *tevāfuk*, "coincidence"), parts of the text were written in red to show where the same group of letters are in the same position on facing pages.

The development of the *tevāfuklu* variant of the *āyet ber kenār* system had occurred by 1789—90, when the Khalili ms. QUR 33 was copied (*fig. 2*). This manuscript shows that the rubrications were added after the text had been manipulated to produce as many coincidences as the originator of the scheme could manage within the *āyet ber kenār* system. The result is what, in the context of the deeply conservative late Ottoman tradition of Qur'ān production, are some extraordinary page layouts. The high-point of this manipulation occurs in the openings at the end of the *sūra al-Šu'arā'* (XXVI) (*figs. 3, 4*). Here the originator of the scheme was prepared to dismantle the standard template in order to maximize the coincidences in the text on facing pages.

As a consequence of the re-arrangement of the text on these pages, the "interchangeability" of this manuscript (ms. QUR 33) with ms. QUR 10 seen on folios 149b—150a (*figs. 1, 2*) is not apparent when we examine, say, folios 228b—229a. In ms. QUR 10 these pages contain verses 27—60 of the *sūra Ṣād* (XXXVIII), while in ms. QUR 33 they contain verses 127—82 of the *sūra al-Ṣāffāt* (XXXVII). All that has happened, in fact, is that the text in ms. QUR 33 has been pushed three pages forward by the redesign of folios at the end of *al-Šu'arā'*, and in ms. QUR 10 we find verses 127—82 of *al-Ṣāffāt* three pages back, on folios 226b—227a.

Like the *āyet ber kenār* system as a whole, "rubrication of coincidence" remained popular in the 19th century. Déroche has discussed it in connection with a Qur'ān in the National Library in Tunis (ms. 14, 246), which was copied in 1858 by a Tunisian *mamlūk* called al-Ḥājj Zuhayr al-Ḥanafī [19]. Déroche showed that the manuscript was a reworking of the *tevāfuklu* form in the Maġribī style of script, and its production was a symptom of the continuing power of Ottoman models in Tunisian society in the 19th century.

As his comparative material, Déroche used a Qur'ān in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul (ms. 469), which was copied in 1270/1852—3 by Yusuf Rasih, a pupil of Ahmed Nazifi. Now Ahmed Nazifi was a resident of Shumen in north-west Bulgaria, which was a flourishing centre of Qur'ān production between the 1820s and 1878, when the city was incorporated into the new Bulgarian kingdom [20]. Yusuf Rasih must have studied with Ahmed Nazifi in Shumen, and he may well have still been living there when he produced his Qur'ān of 1852—3, especially since all the Shumen Qur'āns I have been able to examine were produced according to variants of the *āyet ber kenār* system.

Although the Shumen manuscripts are distinguished from their 18th-century predecessors by a completely new style of illumination, their reliance on 18th-century tradition in other matters and their consistency as a group marks them out as a provincial apotheosis of the "standard Ottoman Qur'ān". What is more, the lavish quality of some examples, such as ms. QUR 343 in the Khalili Collection, which was produced by Seyyid Mehmed Nuri in 1266/1849—50 [21], suggests that by this time *āyet ber kenār* Qur'āns had found a wider market. This in turn presages the use of the *āyet ber kenār* format in many printed Qur'āns produced in the 20th century, some of which are of very high quality.

Indeed, the "interchangeability" of *āyet ber kenār* Qur'āns makes them as much like printed books as a manuscript can be. It is certainly possible that there was some connection between an increased familiarity with printing and the development of a system where the same text appeared in the same place on the same page in an impressively large number of manuscripts. Perhaps, in the debates over the legitimacy of printing texts in the Arabic script, someone brought this advantage forward as an argument in favour of introducing printing, and the *āyet ber kenār* Qur'ān was invented as a response. It has to be admitted, however, that the link with printing is not needed to explain the development of the *āyet ber kenār* system, which fitted the needs of a particular segment of Ottoman society [22].

Notes

1. T. Stanley, "Istanbul and its scribal diaspora. The calligraphers of Müstakim-zade", M. Bayani, A. Contadini and T. Stanley, *The Decorated Word. Qur'āns of the 17th to 19th Centuries* [The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, IV/1] (London, 1999), pp. 60—2.

2. *Ibidem.*, p. 66.

3. *Ibidem.*

4. *Ibidem.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 62—3.

5. *Ibidem.*

6. Bayani, Contadini and Stanley, *op. cit.*, No. 25; see also p. 63 (= Stanley, *op. cit.*, p. 63).

7. F. Déroche, "The Ottoman roots of a Tunisian calligrapher's *tour de force*", *Sanatta etkileşim / Interaction in art, proceedings of a symposium held at Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Ankara, 25—27 November 1998* (Ankara, 2000), pp. 106—7. My thanks to François for sending me a copy of his paper while it was still in manuscript.

8. *Ibidem.*

9. See F. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian–English Dictionary* (Calcutta, 1892; repr. Beirut, 1970), p. 177, *s. v. bar kanār*, where the phrase is defined as "on one side, clear of, free". This seems a more convincing rendering of *āyet ber kenār* than "with a verse [ending] at the margin", the translation I offered previously. See Stanley, "Shumen as a centre of Qur'ān production in the 19th century", *M. Uğur Derman Armağanı. Altmışbeşinci Yaşı Münasebetiyle Sunulmuş Tebliğler…*, ed. Irvin Cemil Schick (Istanbul, 2000), p. 501.

10. Müstakim-zade Süleyman Sa'deddin Efendi, *Tuhfe-i Hattātīn*, ed. Ibnülemin Mahmud Kemal Bey (Istanbul, 1928), pp. 531—2; *s. v.* Mustafa ibn 'Abd al-Baqi. Mustafa's death occurred soon after that of Mehmed Rasim himself, whom Mustafa had contrived to displease in some way. The master's fierce reaction caused Müstakim-zade to quote the Persian hemistich, *Az nafas-ī pīr bitars ay javān* ("Beware the words of old men, O youth!").

11. Ş. Rado, *Türk Hattatları* (Istanbul, 1984), p. 28, footnote.

12. Déroche, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

13. N. Safwat, *Golden Pages Qur'āns and Other Manuscripts from the Collection of Ġassan I. Shaker* (Oxford, 2000), No. 50. Safwat confused Yakacık Imamı with Yağcı-zade and tried to attribute this manuscript to the latter, despite its date.

14. Bayani, Contadini and Stanley, *op. cit.*, No. 27.

15. Müstakim-zade, *op. cit.*, p. 89; Rado, *op. cit.*, pp. 106—7. See also Bayani, Contadini and Stanley, *loc. cit.*

16. *Ibid.*, Nos. 31, 35, 37, 39, 40.

17. This manuscript was copied by a scribe called Hasan Nuri; see *ibid.*, No. 40.

18. This manuscript was copied by a scribe called Salih Vehbi, a pupil of Osman Hilmi; see *ibid.*, No. 39.

19. Déroche, *op. cit.* The manuscript was published in facsimile by 'Abd al-Karīm Ben 'Abdallah in Tunis in 1983.

20. Stanley, "Shumen as a centre of Qur'ān production in the 19th century".

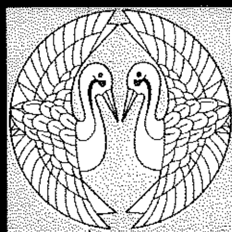
21. J. M. Rogers, *Empire of the Sultans. Ottoman art from the collection of Nasser D. Khalili* (Geneva, 1995), No. 41; Stanley, *op. cit.*, figs. 2—5, 8—10.

22. I would like to thank Irvin C. Schick for his help in the early stages of my research on this subject, which is still far from complete.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, QUR 10, folios 149b—150a.
Fig. 2. The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, QUR 33, folios 149b—150a.
Fig. 3. The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, QUR 33, folios 189b—190a.
Fig. 4. The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, QUR 33, folios 190b—191a.

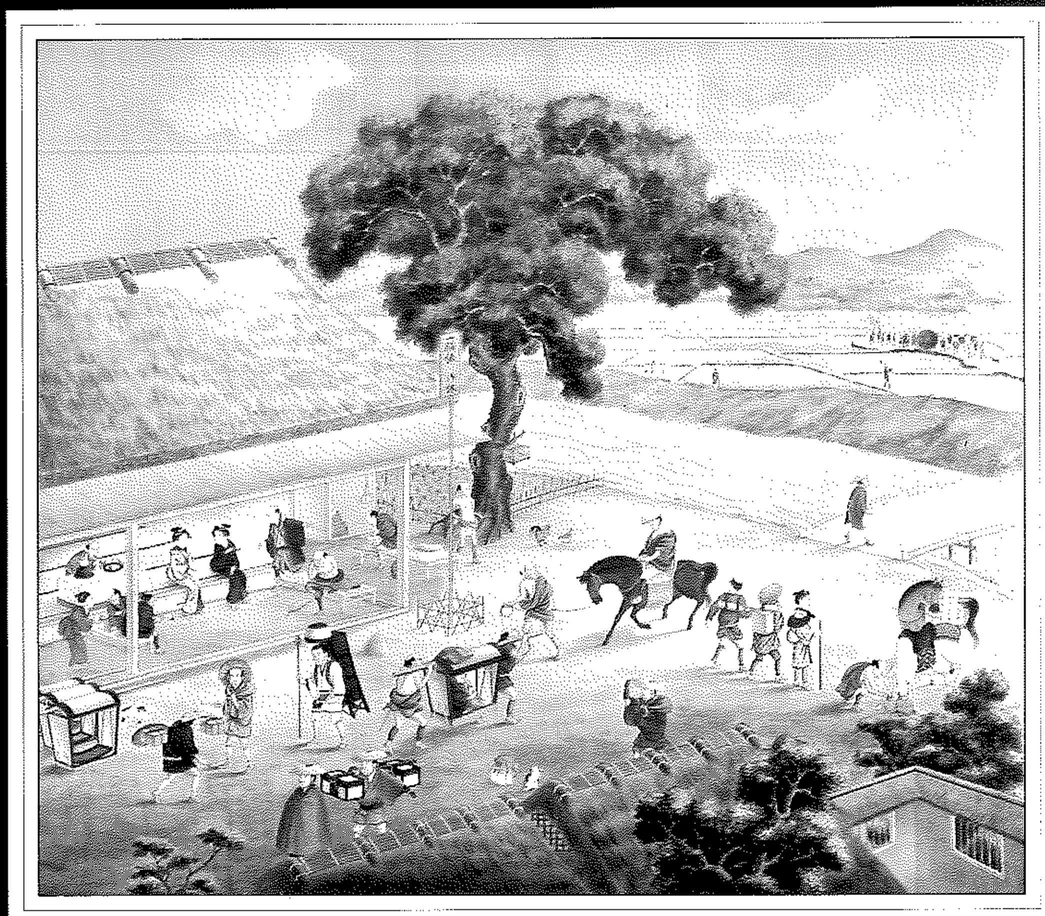
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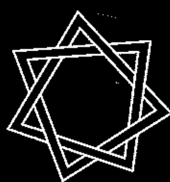


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